1: Rivers E-5 (ca. 1901-02) 1906 Toda

THE TESHERST CEREMONY

234X 261 793 796 887 This qualifying ceremony for the office of *palol* is always performed by a number of men at the same time. The number taking part must be three, five, seven or nine. There seemed to be no doubt that it was not permissible for four, six or eight men to perform the ceremony together. One or two Todas told me that an even number of men might do the ceremony, but all the more trustworthy witnesses were agreed that there must be an uneven number, and on all the occasions of which I could obtain records of actual ceremonies, an uneven number of men had done *tesherst* together. The ceremony may not be performed while the funeral ceremonies of any Teivali person are uncompleted.

At the time of my visit there were only nine or ten men who had been through the *tesherst* ceremony, including those who were holding or had held the office of *palol*. It was proposed that a number of the younger men should perform the ceremony about this time, but it had to be delayed till the second funeral ceremonies of two Teivali women had been held.

The *tesherst* ceremony always begins on a Monday after the new moon. It takes place at certain villages where people are living, and in all the cases of which I obtained records it had been done at Kudrnakhum, belonging to the Nòdrsol, or at Pushtar, belonging to the Taradrol. People must be living at the village at the time the ceremony is performed.

The candidates go to the village on Monday evening, accompanied by two or three Nòdrs men. All go to a stream by a wood and the ceremony begins after sunset, when all the candidates throw off their cloaks and stand in a row. A man of the Nòdrs clan has a *tuni* in his hand and each candidate asks three times, "*Tunivatkina?*"—"Shall I touch the *tuni?*"—and each time the Nòdrs man replies, "*Tunivat!*" The first man in the row touches the *tuni* and then the others in order. The Nòdrs man then gives the *tuni* to the first man who touched it, and he tears it into as many pieces

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as there are candidates, giving a piece to each man, who puts it in the string of his *kuvn*. All then go in search of the leaves of *muli* and each plucks seven leaves and seven shoots. They go to the stream, one by one, and each drinks and rubs himself with the shoots seven times, as in the ordination ceremony, and puts the shoots in his back hair.

While they are doing this, the Nòdrs man will have made fire by friction, using the wood of *muli*, and the men warm themselves at the fire. Each man then goes in search of seven *tudr* leaves and *tudr* bark and carries out the usual purification ceremony once only, drinking out of each of the seven leaves, after which the men take food prepared by another of the Nòdrs men, and all pass the night in the wood. Next morning the men fetch *tudr* bark and leaves and repeat the drinking and rubbing ceremony of the previous evening, but on this occasion each man says "*Tesh-niròdinam*," as he throws the leaf over his head after drinking. All then bathe completely in the stream.

While they are doing this, the Nòdrs men have been cooking a large amount of food, more than the candidates can readily eat, and an old woman of the Tartharol who is to take part in the ceremony has bathed and dressed in her best clothes and put on all the ornaments she can procure: gold earrings, necklace, bracelets, and rings. When the men have bathed, they wait till the message comes that the food is ready, and then each man takes off his piece of *tuni* and his *pennar* and his *kuvn*, so that he is completely naked. The Nòdrs man portions out the food and puts it on *tudr* leaves, the portion for each man being more than he can possibly eat at one sitting, and the portions of food are given to the old woman, who sits down with her back to the men. Each man goes up behind the back of the old woman, and she gives him his portion of food by putting her hand behind her back so that she does not look at him, and in doing so she says three times "*Teshtòrtudenk?*"—"*Tesh* food have I not given?" The men take the food, go into the thickest part of the wood and eat it. None of the food prepared on this occasion may be eaten by the Nòdrs men or by the old woman, but though the amount is excessive, the whole of it must be eaten by the

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candidates during the day. After each man has eaten to the full he may put on his cloak. The Nòdrs men and the old woman go back to their villages and they must hold no communication of any kind with the candidates after the food has been given. The men remain in the wood all day, and when it is getting dark they go to the nearest village at which any of them live, taking care that no one sees them on the way.

One of the most remarkable features of this ceremony is the part taken by the old woman. She must be one of the Tartharol; she must be past the age of child-bearing, and she must never have had intercourse with one of her own clan. In the last particular the word of the woman is trusted, for it was said that she would never deceive in such a matter. Every woman believed that if she did not speak the truth she would die, and all those concerned in the ceremony would either die or have serious illness. I was told that it was by no means easy to find a woman who fulfilled this requirement, and in each of the cases of which I have records the same woman officiated—viz. Naspilthi of Taradr (21).

Other remarkable features of this ceremony are that the men should be given more food than they are readily able to eat, as in the ceremony connected with the *kaltmokh* after the migration (p. 139), and that they receive this food in a condition of complete nudity, a condition which only occurs in one other dairy ceremonial.

The *tesherst* ceremony is one in which candidates for the office of *palol* go through certain of the rites which ordinarily form part of the process of ordination, with the addition of special ceremonies, in which a superabundant portion of food is given by a woman who fulfils certain peculiar conditions.

When the office of *palol* becomes vacant, the clan to which the *ti* belongs chooses from among those who have been through the *tesherst* ceremony, and the chosen man has then to undergo the ordination ceremonies proper, or *nirò̀diti*.

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234 415 778 788 sanctity of the vessel became so great that it was not thought right to leave it exposed to the dangers it might incur in the dairy, especially in the various migrations, and it was therefore buried in the buffalo pen of the chief village of the clan. It is probable that the custom arose in the way suggested by the procedure of the Kanòdrs dairy, but that the full development of the custom has been largely due to the belief in its special sanctity.

261 788 The obscure observance of having a ball of food larger than can be eaten at one sitting occurs twice in the various dairy ceremonials. It is a feature of the ceremonies which the *kaltmokh* has to undergo on the day after the migration of the Nòdrs *ti* to Anto, and the superabundant portion of food has also to be eaten by the candidate for the office of *palol* in the preliminary ceremony called *tesherst*. In each case the food is of the ceremonial kind called *ashkkaatpimi*. I can offer no suggestions as to the meaning of the observance, nor do I know of any parallel for it.

Purity and Impurity

234 783 The idea of ceremonial purity is one running through the whole of the dairy rites. Many of the details of the ritual, the purification of new vessels and of dairies revisited after a period of disuse, the ordination ceremonies of the dairyman, the elaborate ceremonies accompanying the making of new *pep*, all show a very deeply engrained idea that men and things have in themselves some degree of impurity, and that in order to be made fit for the service of the gods, they must be purified and sanctified by appropriate ceremonies.

As regards man two grades of impurity are recognised: (i.) the impurity of the ordinary man, which is perhaps an absence of ceremonial purity rather than actual impurity; and (ii.) the special impurity which is the result of certain events and especially of those accompanying birth and death.

The impurity of the ordinary man does not prevent him from visiting the dairies of the lower grade, but it prohibits him from taking any part whatever in the actual dairy operations. With certain exceptions, he is rigorously excluded

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FOOD

262 The chief foods are milk, buttermilk, ghi, grain, rice, and
272 sugar. The chief drink is buttermilk, and milk is used chiefly when boiled with rice or grain.

252 In clarifying their butter the Todas add some grain or rice,
262 and this forms a sediment on the bottom of the cooking vessel which is called *al*, which is the chief food of the dairymen, and it is probably also used largely as a food in ordinary life.

262 A list of various herbs, fruits, &c., eaten by the Todas is
437 given by Mr. Thurston.[1] There is very little doubt that at one time these were used much more largely than at present, when the grain provided by the Badagas is supplemented by rice and grain bought in the bazaar. The Todas have a tradition of a time when they lived chiefly on roots, herbs, fruits and honey, and the importance of honey comes out in several of their legends.

252 A much prized substance called *patcherski* is made from
262 *samai* grain (*Panicum miliare*), which is roasted and pounded so as to get rid of the husk. It is used in the preparation of a food which is eaten on all the chief ceremonial occasions. When they prepare it the Todas say "*ashkkartpimi*," and this verbal form is used as the name of the food. In making *ashkkartpimi*, *patcherski* is put into a basket (*tòdri*) which has been carefully cleansed by rubbing it all over with dried buffalo-dung. Buttermilk and jaggery are added and the whole mixed together and rolled into balls, each about as large as a cricket ball. When eating, a hole is made in the ball into which ghi and butter, sometimes honey,
261 are poured, and then the hole is covered with rice.[2] A man will usually eat two of these balls at a feast, but a greedy man may manage three or four.

264 The Todas do not like others to see them eating, and if
754 this happens, the same consequences may ensue as are produced by the evil eye.

[1] *Bulletin*, vol. iv., p. 16.

[2] *Ashk* is one of the Toda words for rice, and the name of the food is therefore derived from this substance.